

CATALYST



Hallmarks

Spring 2004

Definition of Poetry

A friend once said to me, "I love it when an assignment is to write a poem. All you have to do to sound good is write a lot of big words and separate them into lines. It's so easy."

I sat there, trying to comprehend what my friend had just stated. A negative aura crept closer, strangling the thoughts and words in my head. This however is a much too common ritual of mine. My words are choked and then late into the night, I find them displaying themselves through a rapid stroke of a pen onto a thin sheet of paper. The paper, it is so thin, I sometimes wonder if it can bear the darkness I usually burden it with.

Poetry is not an assignment. It is so much more than "sounding good" and it is not measured in how easy or hard it is to write. It is a wild heart silently screaming in the quiet of a room. Only the writer feels this sense of exuberance, frustration, fear, joy, this sense of relief. It is created from the writer and for the writer. It is liberation within the confinements of broken white lines. Poetry is a rhythm that gracefully waltzes with the writer's pulse and with the night.

Poetry is personal, though some pieces should be shared with the world because every so often, the heart and soul of the writer screams loud enough on a thin sheet of paper to touch another soul. When this happens, the reader feels this sense of tranquility, comfort, warmth, this sense of being understood. And when this occurs, even for just one moment, the reader has been transformed. His heart has been touched by another.

This, my friend, is poetry.

—Nancy Sisk



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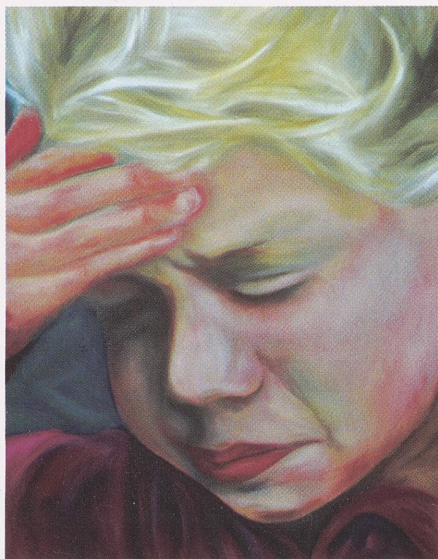
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For Natalie

Just like I was, at fourteen,
That age when nothing seems to fit,
Just before you discover
How powerless you are,
How small you are growing up to be –
If my ghost could stand before a mirror,
You would stare back.
You're just like I was,
Impatient to live,
And you think truth is something
you have a right to -



Poetry

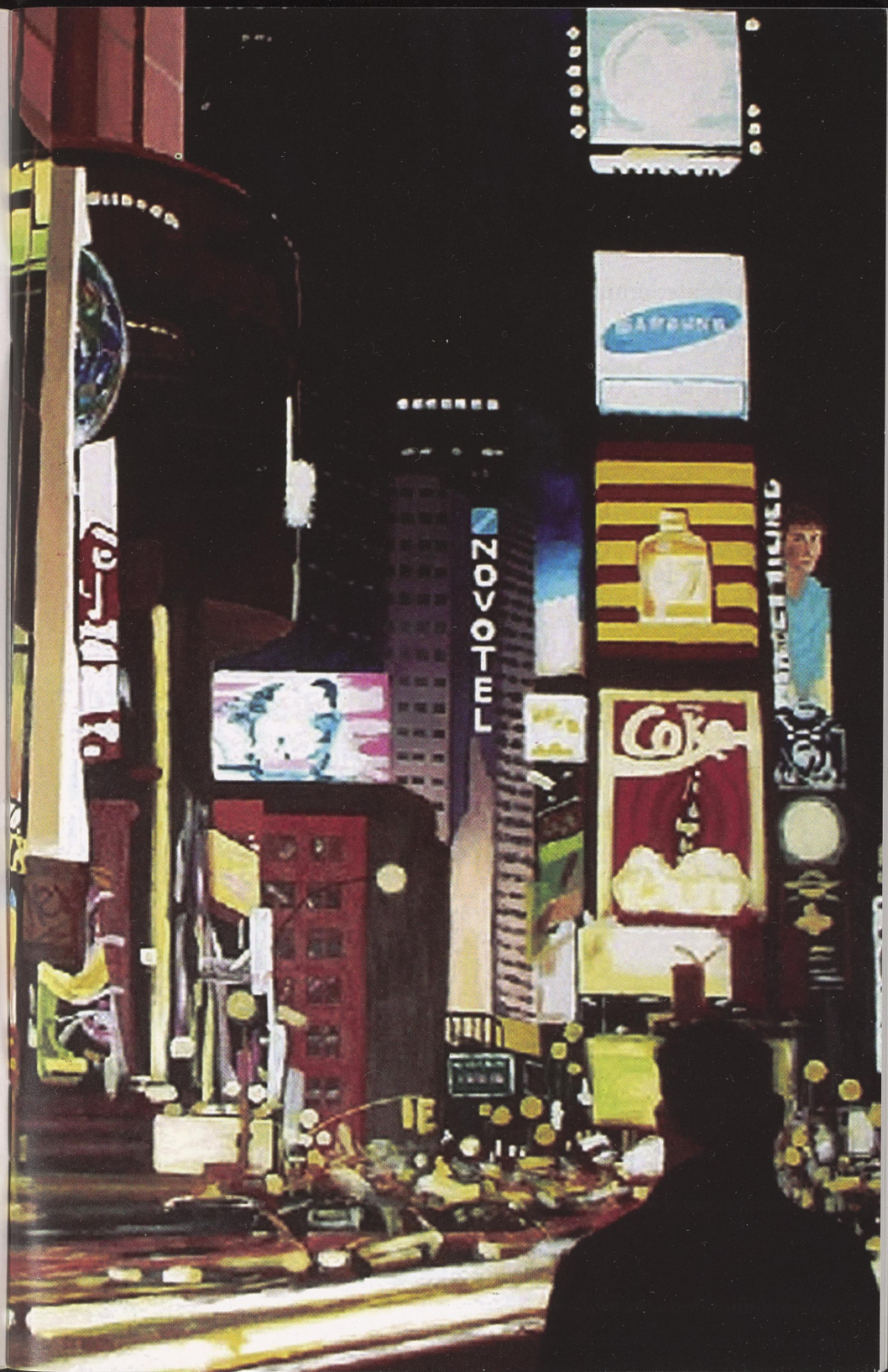
I'm afraid I can't write poems anymore;
I become a befuddled magician,
Embarrassed onstage,
Unable to produce a bouquet.
Love just isn't so intense anymore
And Death is too much a mystery,
Scoffing at my foolish speculation,
Or else
It has become too amiable,
Calling on the telephone,
Walking down the street.
Nothing to say about the moon anymore,
Nothing to say of the night –
The sun, the skies, the trees, the flowers, every drop of water,
Bland. All crusty, wrung out rags
That can no longer wash away the grime
To reveal some little truth.

The Night Life

I want sax music in the background of my life
Patent leather tapping with my city sidewalk feet
Champagne stained tuxedo lips
A delicate, lovely me
I want a world in rhythm
Always high from a night gone by

I want chocolate mousse at the door when I'm down
Friends to the nines for a night on the couch
Pajama tears and grins
Tuneless tangled voices
I want a world in rhythm
Always high from a night gone by

I want neon pavement shadows to show the way
Inky wet addresses from the new hotspot
Velvet ropes swinging
Dark and clever strangers
I want a world in rhythm
Always high from a night gone by



Young Men

Young men are the light on at midnight; the first empty plate; crammed notes in the margin. Secret sensitivity tucked inside gym bags and guitar cases. They grab their mothers' arms, dance them breathlessly in circles; they save memories in smelly cigar boxes. Young men are a maiden on a track, a tower-ridden virgin, a red-leashed spaniel – brisk footed, slack tongued. Their loins can burn before the pulpit or pulse before the casket. They read *The Iliad* and are Odysseus; the sinews of their mortal heels brace the blow; their hearts race in wooden-bellied hush. Young men are wet plaster and new-paned windows. They are the rhythmic role, they are the quick in and out shadows of fingers on glass, and they are bits of paper left on the pew. Young men fight the stop sign, tap the horn, need to begin.



Shades of Baby

Peek-a-boo.

Lift your hands away,
flash your bent smile at me.

Jaded and icy, laughing
bitter. Like silver.

A game played with a child,
bright-eyed and shining.
Trusting and fresh. Baby
smiles. Like pink.

Your hands are worn now,
used over and over to manipulate.
Second-hand and stained, burnt
rough. Like brown.

Reality stares me down.
I see you for who you are.
Deceptive and sharp. Baby
cries. Like blue.

Peak-a-boo.

I understand now that you've lifted your fingers;

I'm enlightened and miserable.

Broken and lonely, mourn

Hollow. like black.



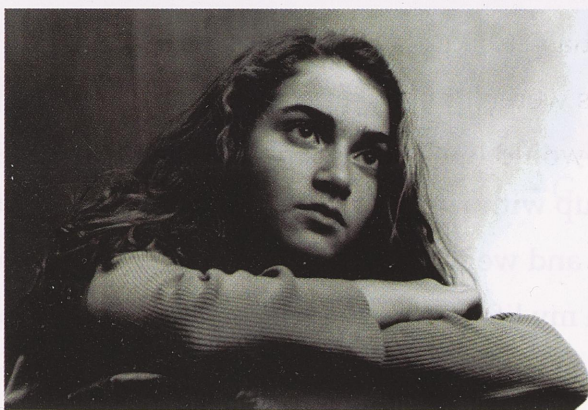
-G. Wachtler

The Worst That Could Happen

I was only ten years old, and barely old enough to understand the complexities of the situation. Suddenly I was unlike everyone else, wrenched from the mass of "normal" people, and stuck into a category to call my very own. At a time when being accepted and liked by everyone was all that mattered, you threw a fastball into my life that struck me right in the face.

It was a Saturday in June when you told me, after my softball game. We had won, and Dad offered to buy me anything I wanted at the concessions. This was odd, since he usually said we had perfectly good food at home. I credited his generosity towards winning the game and I got a chocolate malt. We went home, and you told me to sit on the couch. I sat, eating my ice cream while my jersey sticking to my back and sweat dripping from my temple. All I really wanted was a hot shower. You said you had bad news. I immediately conjured the worst thing that I could think of. All I came up with was that Dad finally got that promotion he wanted, and we were moving to Tennessee. To me, that would ruin my life. But the problem was I thought only of my own needs, and not of yours.

"I have cancer," you said. Cancer was not something I was unfamiliar with. I watched it take my grandma some five years earlier. I saw you cry as you kissed your mommy goodbye one last time. I remembered the withered, sickly look she had, the way her house always stank of vomit after she had gone for chemotherapy. It was still vivid in my memory, the way after she died, everyone, including me, spoke in hushed tones, as if not to upset her broken-hearted family. I saw our house, the cream-colored walls and fresh white carpets, all crushed under that thick depression. From that moment on, I knew that I would have to watch you leave me, the same way people would whisper around me, afraid to speak out loud. The same way I whispered around you not so long ago.



-A. Alexander

Cold

Angel of the concrete overpass,
Pale white skin and dirty wings.
She waits to fall with baby's breath.
She longs to numb everything.

Final breath

Shed a tear

Clenched fist

Wrapped in fear

Never to see another sunrise,
For every bulb is burnt out-
Drained of all colors,
So empty the look in her eye--
The world has dulled her shine.
If her wings weren't too torn to fly,
Maybe she would have been fine.

Thrown away

Worthless

Stained by time

So nervous...

She was from a perfect world.
We all were, we're all blind.
But as we gaze from the cliffs to the sea
Black eyes, gray soul, everything
Left behind, for we can't walk on water.
It's not a perfect world.

Final smile
So divine
Blood runs cold
Stained by time...

Flesh of cream white,
Lips of pale blue,
Eyes closed, no more pain
How I envy you...

Hallmarks



-K. Corcoran



-A. Alexander



-A. Alexander

Last Mission

Lie on ground

Stare at ceiling

Gone so numb

No more feeling.

One let down

Then another.

Shiver silently

Pull tight covers.

Drain swiftly

Light to dark.

Day to night

No more marks.

Life to death

Slip to sleep.

Take slowly

Please don't weep.

No yelling

No more noise.

Carry on-

On with poise.

Say goodnight

One more time.

What wrong?

She was fine.

Fine goes wrong

Wrong turns worse.

Always burdened

With this curse.

Time to go-

This transition.

Won't hurt long

This last mission.

Chickens

On the way to her grandfather's house,
She bops happily as she eats her sandwich.

She has never been on a farm before.

All the animals are so cute.

But she loves chickens best.

She watches the little white powderpuffs

Cooing and clucking here and there

Plump, juicy

Hurtle their heads to the ground

In search of their feed

Nuggets, tenders, fingers, strips

They socialize merrily

Waddling and gossiping

Fries with that?

They hide in their coop at night

And lay their eggs

Fried, scrambled, sunny side up.

And at their roosters' calling
Burst glorious into the new day's sunlight

Breaded, baked, grilled, fried

Drunk with the joy of living
Whirls of soft white feathers

Pillows, comforters, jackets, beds

Her grandfather coaxes them
beyond the wires into the big red barn.

Breast, drumstick, thigh, wing.

Her chicken sandwich is unsettled in her stomach
She watches them flap their wings in wonder
At the sight of their reflections
In the blades.

Leaving Home

Leaving home is staring at the letter in the mailbox marked by the return address of your future. It is the anticipation of opening that letter, hoping that by simply breaking the seal, you will find the map to your life inside land-marked by the answers to all your questions. At the same time you know that by opening that envelope, a whole new wave of questions that you had never thought of will be introduced. Leaving home is the dusty box of crap that seems to have no real place anywhere in your room, and whose contents eventually inhabit "the junk drawer."

Leaving home is the first chord of a fledgling song; new, exciting, timid, undeveloped, and deeply personal. It is the new relationship that makes you nervously giggle while the butterflies devour the inside of your stomach. It is a cartoon character running off a cliff, and defying gravity for over ten seconds before coming to the stark realization that there is no ground beneath him, at which point, he adheres to the natural laws and begins to plummet towards uncertain death. Leaving home is taking a cold shower after running in the summer humidity. It is the fear of turning into your mom, and sounding just like your dad. It is the book that sits on your bedside table for years waiting to be

finished. It is giving away the clothes that you wore only once, and sorting through white t-shirts that have little more than sentimental value. Leaving home is tossing and turning in your bed at 4 a.m. like you do on the first day of school. It is buying turnip greens rather than a super-sized bag of dangerously-cheesy Cheetos. Leaving home is returning to your bed, only to find it feels more spacious than you remembered, lonelier than before, and uncomfortably foreign. Leaving home is the empty bed that once cradled you to peace and now swallows you into its vast emptiness. Leaving home is returning home six months later to sort through the piles of junk mail that have collected on your dresser.

Soaring

Soaring

I been there

Soaring

Silent sail in port

Still soaring

Silent speech

That won hard smiles

At court

Still soaring

Silent voice that woke

Most sleepy hope

Still soaring

I been soaring

Soaring

Everywhere

When I'm down

And down

Without sled

Without skates

Without surf

Without sun-

Basted sand

On a thought without

Shoes without

Sweet corner bed

I dream of

Soaring

And soon

(Imagine!)

I'm

Soaring

There

Yes, soaring there

You're

Soaring

Look:

We're all

Soaring

Again



-S. Norton

Soldier

The morning campaign alerts the purse
To the latest events: a flourish, a facial and then
A rich dessert of cut red freshets and flesh
With tossed dressings
Above the gravy hearse.

In the boutique she charges her locks to fall
Like sheer epaulettes over the grim wall
Of brow and neck—fine ropes strung
Down for executing beauty's sake
With a war still on, and nails to break.

Improper Body Parts

Natalie climbed a huge tree with a thick trunk and so many branches that if you stood underneath and looked straight up, the sky could hardly be seen. It was the largest tree I'd ever seen, certainly the biggest in Centennial Park. Mark and I stood beneath, looking up at her and making jokes.

"Did I ever tell you about last winter when I went skiing and slipped and somersaulted all the way down the mountain?" Natalie asked.

Mark shot me a mischievous look. "Sort of like that time when you—"

"Mark!" I said, eyes flashing. "I thought we weren't going to mention that, remember?"

"What?" Natalie was instantly attentive. "What's this story you haven't told me?"

"Nothing important," I said.

"I told a secret!" Mark gasped, clapping his hand over his mouth in mock horror.

"Yes, you did," I said. "We're going on a little walk now." We walked about fifteen paces away, still within Natalie's line of vision, and I stopped. "Mark, darling, I think you need to work on your discretion."

"Sorry," he apologized flippantly. "Sorry, sorry, *sorry*."

"I forgive you." I glanced down and noticed his hands. "God, you have the narrowest hands I've ever seen."

He shoved his hands into his pockets. "I know."

"It's not like a bad thing. I have the tiniest hands ever. They stopped growing when I was ten. I'm serious. I want to see your hands." I stepped forward.

Mark took a step backwards so that he was nearer to Natalie. "No."

"Please?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't like wrists."

Natalie said, "For the love, Mark, stop hiding your wrists like that. You'd think you had scars from slitting them or something."

"Really," I said. "I was starting to think you'd attempted suicide."

"No, no slit wrists here. I wouldn't want to look at them long enough to cut them," Mark said.

"What's wrong with wrists?" I asked, holding mine up for observation.

Mark shuddered. "I hate them. They're just.... Oh, I hate them."

"They are pretty freaky," Natalie said, still sitting in the tree. She was looking at hers and tracing the visible veins. "But I didn't know about your wrist phobia, Mark."

"I can't help it. They're the one thing that I just completely cannot—" he broke off.

"I don't understand," I said. "Is it just your wrists? Or all wrists in general?"

"All of them, but I really hate mine. I wish I could get rid of them."

"What do you want to do? What would you have in place of wrists?"

"I don't know. Just... something else."

"I have thin wrists," I observed, encircling my left wrist with my right thumb and forefinger. "Look how much my fingers overlap."

"You think *you* have thin wrists? Have you seen *my* wrists?"

"No, you won't let me see them." I stepped towards him and unsuccessfully tried to grab his hand. "You're such a tease."

"I don't even like to look at my own wrists. There's no way you're seeing them."

"Please?" I smiled winningly. "I showed you my wrists."

"Sorry, not happening."

"I love you?"

"And I love you, but not enough to show you my wrists."

"Mark. Just let me see your wrists." I took a step forward.

"No." He stepped backwards.

"It's not that big a deal."

"Exactly! So no more wrists. Why do you want to see mine, anyway?"

"Because you won't let me." I leapt at him and he pulled back, knocking into the tree. I tried to grab his arm but he slipped away, continuing to move backwards until he was nearly running.

"Natalie!" Mark yelled. "She's trying to get me to show her improper body parts!"

Natalie sighed and shook her head, still examining her wrists. "You kids."

"I saw one!" I cried triumphantly, catching a peek of the inside of his left wrist.

"Damn it!"

"I don't understand you, Mark," I reflected. "I don't understand you at all."

"That's my goal in life," he said. "To make sure no one ever understands me."



-B. Spigel

Spiderman-Rufus

I came out of our room, looking for a friend, for something to do, and locked the door behind me. In my periphery was an irregularity on the stone wall, which, upon closer inspection, appeared to be alive. I jabbed the key at the doorknob, dropped it, picked it up, unlocked the door, slammed it behind me, and screamed. Allison, the lesbian from the next room, came in through our adjoining bathroom. Her eyes were bloodshot and her cheeks were pale, and I knew she had either crushed and snorted her anxiety-depression medication—again—or had been writing poetry for hours. I had expected to meet unusual types at a writer's conference, but I hadn't been prepared for Allison. By age fifteen she had become a chain smoker, attempted suicide, been institutionalized, come out of the closet as a lesbian, gone back into the closet and dated guys exclusively, come out of the closet again, and—per the advice of her psychologist—written reams of poetry, all of it bad. She was a pathological liar and an emotional train wreck, and I was crazy for her.

"Sweetie?" she said, looking around the room.

"What's going on?"

"There's a *thing* outside, on the wall. God only knows what it is. It looked like a rat... or a tail-less squirrel... maybe a bat." I tilted my head and furrowed my brow. "Are there even bats around here?"

"God, I don't know. I want to see it!"

I grabbed her arm. "But if it's a bat, it could be one of those blood-sucking kinds."

"Well, somebody has to look at it." It was at this point that I realized she was slightly stoned; otherwise she would have never chosen to examine an unknown creature.

However, she did have a point: I couldn't spend all evening hiding in my room. Allison went outside to look at it while I called Helen, a beautiful brunette from the suburbs of Los Angeles and my best friend at the conference. She was disgusted and thrilled as I described the creature. She promised to come over in "seriously, like, two seconds."

A few minutes later Helen, Allison, and I had a discussion an arm's length away from the thing, which Helen had authoritatively declared a bat. I had begun to shriek until she clamped a hand over my mouth. "Shhh," she had said. "We don't want to wake it."

"What should we name it?" asked Allison. "It could be here a while."

"It could be our mascot!" Helen said.

"That *thing*," I said, "is not our mascot."

"Spiderman," Helen decided. The movie had been in theaters that year and proved a hit.

"Why Spiderman?" I said. "If we have to name it, why not something pretty? What if we named it Rosie?"

Allison and Helen looked at me in annoyance. "It's a boy," Allison said.

"That's ridiculous. You don't know that."

"Rufus," Allison said.

"I like that," Helen said. "But I like Spiderman better."

"Rufus Spiderman?" Allison suggested.

"Spiderman Rufus," Helen said.

"With or without a hyphen?" I jokingly asked.

"With," they said simultaneously, and I shrugged my agreement.

Spiderman-Rufus stayed on our wall for three days, clinging upside down to the same stone. Now that the fear was recognized, named, I began to feel a small amount of affection for it, even pride that the creature had chosen the wall outside *my* room. No one ever saw Spiderman-Rufus move. I began to be afraid he had died. Then early one

morning I left my room, intending to borrow a razor from Helen, and I noticed Spiderman-Rufus had left. I woke up Allison to tell her; she was grumpy but shifted into sadness at the lost of our mascot.

That afternoon in the coffeehouse, as I muddled through a complicated satire on modern life, Helen used Sharpies, glitter pens, and her typical dramatic flair to make a sign that read, "Spiderman-Rufus once was here/ Now we know not whether far or near/ In our hearts he still will fly/ As through starry evening sky." She intended to hang the sign on Spiderman-Rufus's former spot on the wall, so that everyone could know he had once hung there. As Helen colored, these thoughts occurred to me: that we are never as far from nature as we would like to believe; that prescription medications, when abused, do wonders for courage; and, above all, that fears are fleeting and often useless.

Hallmarks



-C. Cohen

Hallmarks



-N. Sisk

Dove Flight

For weeks I didn't water Mother's ferns
that paled beneath the eaves. Among the wilting
fronds two doves sat still in solid watch,
ceramic thieves, eyes round and dark and stern.
One day the male was gone, the mother crouched
beside two downy young, necks thin with spring.
I ached at their beginning, fed from her mouth
and watched for flight. I didn't see their wings—
one day the nest was empty, just in time
to drench the fern and coax it back to life.
All this coming and going such a fragile rhythm:
water and sun, withhold and give, nurse and free.
My mother in a darkened room had packed for flight,
Her face like polished marble, set past sight.

Conversations With Socrates

"How can you sit there so calmly," I asked the philosopher,

"When they have knocked you down and stolen your
freedom?"

"Liberty stems from within the individual," he replied.

"But even the gods, to whom you turned for help, have
forsaken you."

"There are other gods," he said quietly.

"And what of the woman," I persisted in an exasperated
voice, "who treated your love like a toy and cast you aside?"

"Life must go on," he shrugged, taking another sip of
hemlock.



I Dreamed

Somewhere beyond the cotton light
there's music in the dead of night.

I follow you to where I stand
[an orchestra to my command].

I know you hate me more than this
your eyes betray this phony bliss.

Lying there in the blackened snow
euphoria is where embers glow.
The ashy stardust calls to me
and whispers menacingly "he."

I couldn't interpret much from you
cause you bleed black and I bleed you.

Unbreakable

Your eyes: simply the thought of that blue made me choke.

The willingness of your sweet smile was enough, but no.

[Teeth to teeth because our lips were silently singing.]

It was a chorus of yesterday's good-bye.

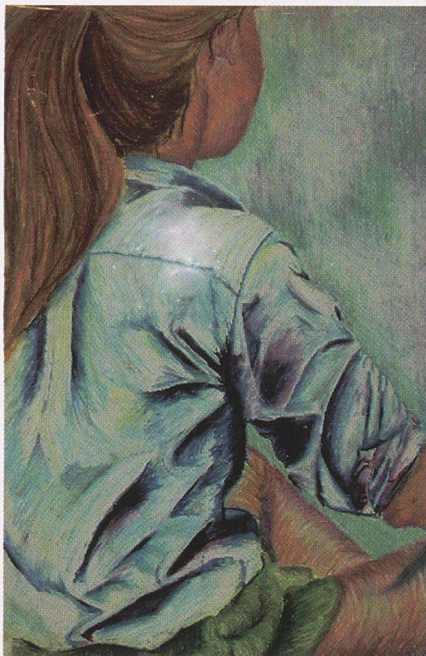
My head on your shoulder,

You would recite words...not your own...to quiet me.

You were the pacifier of your own chaos.

You knew it, too: I was never fragile.

But when you touched me, I broke.



-Anonymous

Follow-Up

I open my mouth,
but the words descend into cracks on the ceiling,
hiding like stray cats abandoned on the side of the road,
afraid of your touch.

Your room is awkward and too cold,
the air conditioner hums in the corner.
I want *it* to tell you how I feel today.

To you my mind is data,
numbers and digits scribbled sadly onto the page.
I want your red pen to explode.

As I watch you, your glasses inching down your nose,
the clock on the wall beats for my heart,
tucked away inside my chest,
waiting for you to show me the door.

Another hour spent in silence,
and the white hallway stares;

mocks the rows of file cabinets behind the fat lady at the
check-out.

One of those files is mine.

I open my mouth,
but the capsule gets caught in my throat.
so desperately I wish it would just dissolve,
another pill to make me happy again.

Thanks a lot.

Requiem

November sits quietly in the rain;
The storm that triggered tragedy and pain,
Another trigger pulled inside your hand,
Which left the living cast into the sand—
What fate is this? That dusty attic seemed so cold,
As something left your face that was untold,
In an attempt to find the sea where you were thrown,
But buried in a cove of flesh and bone.
Lost, like your presence in the laughing crowd,
Your life veiled over by this tear-stained shroud,
The tears, still falling from the girlish eyes,
Praying only that the truths were lies,
Toxic liquid like the bitter rain:
Muffled silence on the night you're slain.

Fading Perfection

A wet paintbrush, drowning in yellow,
Holds tight to its fond memories of blue
With only a taste left on its tongue.
But its fate lies in the hands of another.
The artist, at first not recognizing the impact of his stroke,
Shouts, "Now this is perfection!" after finally
Completing the painting for the third time.
A feast is held in honor of its faultlessness, and
After having one course, all who feed upon its brilliance
Know when the duration of the first toast that
This meal is a hit.
Even when in the spotlight, the painting
Becomes a slave to its critics.
The approval of others is all that matters to it,
Now that it is all that remains.
After a while, the colors of the painting,
Once bold and vibrant, fade in the spotlight
Along with the spotlight itself.
Its challenging radiance dims into the unknown,
Where the painting resides today.

Sprung Sonnet

We bid farewell to the blossoms of Spring,
For toxic heat the scorch'd Summer will bring.
The sweet sweat of flow'rs was nectar at first,
And now lingers in a scent, helpless, and cursed.
As peppermints succumb to burning lips,
Sealing a hint of mint on each tongue's tips,
Springtime blooms all melt to their peppery doom
In the spotlight of a stage that at last entombs.
Preceding the summer is this dying season
Opposing its name, attempting treason;
Since the flowers of Spring are cruelly wrung,
The fitting name should doubtlessly be "Sprung."
How mournful to witness the blooms depart,
While petals are plucked from my own budding heart.



-K. Binkley

Another Week

Another week gone by how can we explain the courses of
our lives in a word, a double entendre?

In the end the leaves never reach the ground before they
arrive a season's gone dry crumble and dust.

Another week gone by can words contain thee "Oh Sweet
Spontaneous Spring" will you ever be mine?

I sing a lullaby a silent song of wonder and if I had you
bottled up in ink — would you be enough?

Come again World?

Come again World?

Come again?

Tell me of mittens

and blood soaked sateen.

Tell me again friend

Tell me again.

Tell me again friend.

Tell me gain.

Tell me about livin',
Where nobody's been.

Tell me about people
With no hand to lend.

Tell me about roses
Tell me about rain-drops

Tell me of words
Of truth that bends.

Tell me about moonshine
Tell me about bomb-drops.

Tell about livin'
Where nobody's been.

Tell me gain friend
Tell me again.

Tell me again friend,
Tell me again.

Tell me about kittens
And war submarines.

Come again World?
Come again?

Time is a Panther Lying in a Tree

Time is a panther lying in a tree;

Hiding, he is always there, yet seldom seen

Until he leaps unexpectedly.

His wise eyes

Watch the birth and growth of many things,

But they collapse at his pounce, all;

Forests fair and tall fall

To build houses sturdy and strong; only these

Slide one day into the sea.

Soldiers die; nations fail

While their women wail,

Curse evil time who pounced

And ate their lives so suddenly:

For time is a panther lying in a tree;

Hiding, he is always there, yet seldom seen

Until he leaps unexpectedly.

Paradox of the Nocturne

There is a blinding light
that hides in the shadows,
scorching my eyes
during the lonely morning hours.
It keeps me awake,
far from a peaceful night's slumber.

There is an eerie darkness
that strips me of all my power,
hardening my heart
during the anxious morning hours.
It keeps me awake,
far from a peaceful night's slumber.

And during these nights,
when everything is quiet
and has faded to grey,
it is then, when you come out to play.
You freeze every breath I take,
And you haunt every thought I create.

You are the creator of my restless terror,
And it is a vicious cycle,
For you are my only savior.

I have given you all, there is nothing more.
So stop haunting me in the night
As you have done so many nights before.
I am ready to end this fright
And all I am begging for
Is to slowly close my eyes,

And drift into a peaceful night.



-Anonymous



-M. Higgins

In Heaven

With no mountains to stop it,
The Wind parades through the
Empty fields.

The occasional barn sways
As its rusted, tired tin roof
Quivers.

The smell of Grandma's familiar perfume
Is omnipresent.

It moves with the wind and
Carries her spirit to the
Four corners of the world.

The dying nature
Waits.

Waiting for the fresh arrival that is
Spring.

Here.

Time Stands Still

My favorite time of the day
Is when the sun kisses the ground
And her majestic rays embrace every last stone.

The mangled trees in yonder pasture
Wonder if the wind ever stops blowing.
Just beyond, the remaining color in the sky
Welcomes the passing clouds.

The wind moves everything, but
Time stands still.



-M. Wright

Arizona

The blue car bakes in the sun,
Misplaced against the burnt rock of the desert.
Like a stranger in a suit
In a room full of ranchers,
I too bake with the heat of the day on my skin.
In the droop of my hair and the smell of my clothes
I stare up at a landscape as foreign as Mars,
Red and broken
Canyons and craters,
And with words unspoken, I abandon.

The blue car to bake in the sun,
Interior blazing
To follow the path that winds up a hill.
I fear the silent leer of the old prickly giants.
Cacti stand at attention,
They ignore the intruders on their rocks
In their desert.
Sweating and straining,
Made for more temperate climates,
I climb as high as I can
And look down the valley

To the blue car below.
I am a speck in its sight as I stand
Alone and moved but unmoving.
Finding my place in this alien world
I stumble back down the path,
Weak from the heat,
Dark hair unfurled,
Mingled with the dust of the desert
In my nose and the sting of my eyes.

I return to the blue car,
To my mother waiting,
Playing old western songs from a brand new CD
As we speed back to the city,
Away from the desert
With the air and the sky and the earth
Stretching past us,
Canyons and craters on all sides,
But we follow smooth asphalt.
Tomorrow my skin will be red
Like the desert- my own fault.
I'll be red but unbroken,
Unbroken, preserved, different in every way.

The All-Nighter

The sweet sliver of light
under my bedroom door,
comforting company,
has gone out.

With unseeing eyes,
I hunch over my computer screen
and cast ghoulish shadows in the
yellow light from the reading lamp.

In the light my hands are golden
and fly adeptly on the keyboard
stretching and flexing to reach that elusive Y.

Each flitting fingertip
spills inky shadows onto the bed
which I have shunned. The tousled sheets tease cruelly
and I like a fool

am lulled into the lie that five minutes in their depths
will alleviate the agony. They

welcome my defeat as I struggle not to
shut my eyes.

I am dead to the certain truth that dawn will be a nightmare.

Apostasy

You've settled in these ruins
Made your home among the ashes—
Each one a burned memory.
Were you ever really happy?
Or was it just bittersweet make-believe,
Secretly always wishing
For that romanticized rebellious life?
And I try to come visit you,
In the aftermath of a fire
You seem proud to have started.
Is this who you are now?
I wonder aloud,
Hoping you'll come to your senses
And begin to build a new life
Out of this quiet desperation.
But you just smile,
And tell me you like it here,
That the smell of fire comforts you
As you sleep,
Content in your apostasy.



-E. Davis

We Are Both Daughters

This hospital room is quiet

As we enter, seeing only

A forlorn figure under white sheets.

But the moment our greetings break the silence

A smile lights her face,

My mother's mother.

She sits up in bed,

Her southern drawl welcoming us in.

We are here to take care of her,

But she insists that she is fine,

And must, of course, play the hostess.

She chatters about her accomplishments—she walked down
the hall yesterday

And ate solid food at noon.

I open the shades, inviting sunlight
Into this dreary room.

From the seventh floor,
I can see all of Birmingham
And perhaps a twinkle of the future
In that mid-day horizon.

The stale hospital air seems filtered
By the meeting of mothers and daughters,
Generations washing into each other
Forming an ocean called family.
I revert to the psychology of a child,
Finding it hard to imagine my grandmother
Playing any other role.

What will it be like?

When the plot remains the same,

But the actors have changed?

We kiss her on each cheek,

And as we leave, I hold my mother's hand

Surprised to find that we are both daughters

And that someday I will play her part.



-G. Wachtler

Eyes Closed

John's eyes did not stray from the blank screen of the television that sat turned off on its mahogany stand. A telephone message blinked its red light into the darkness of the room, an incessant flash reflecting against the blankness of the wall. Without seeming to notice, John's hand clutched the armrest of his chair, knuckles white with a resolute grip. Slowly, he rose from his seat. The chair slid back over the wooden floor with a clatter that magnified the imposing silence creeping through the house. As he walked from living room to the hall, he barely felt the back of his hand brush against the doorframe's smooth edge, and within a minute's time, he found himself in the kitchen.

The lights were out, so he crossed the room to flip up the switch. As his eyes unwillingly adjusted to the brightness, John stopped at the counter, pressing his palms down on its cool surface. She had just cleaned it after dinner. He could still see her wiping away the crumbs and tomato sauce with the torn blue dishrag in her hand. She'd chattered all through the evening while he had barely said a word. She hadn't noticed, though, but had just kept smiling up at him, those newly formed lines softening her gray-blue eyes. At first he had loved those creases, such fine and familiar

pathways to their memories together. Now John could only see her eyes framed in those circles of betrayal, eyes darting left to right with a phone ring, guilty eyes, unfaithful eyes.

Absorbed in his thoughts and what now must be done, John knew just what he'd say, how he'd stare her straight in the eyes and tell her it's over. He knew she'd be in the bedroom, propped up on a pillow in their bed. Her hair would still be wet from the shower, the ends clumped together like the thick bristles of a paint brush, deep black and dripping onto her shoulders. The lamp on her bedside table would be on, illuminating every word she traced with her index finger in her book. She'd smile at him, a funny downward smile because she'd be wearing her reading glasses, and without a word, she'd go back to her reading.

He let out a sigh as he stood wavering in front of the bedroom door, groping for the right words. Finally turning the knob, the brass felt foreign to his touch. He entered the room, loosened his tie and tossed his jacket over the back of a chair by the desk in the corner. Yet when he finally turned to speak to her, John found her already asleep, the book still lying open in her lap, her head resting on her right shoulder, glasses still on her nose. After quietly removing his shoes

and carefully turning off the lamp, John lifted the white comforter and slipped beneath the cotton sheets. He felt her warmth as he lay at her side, her breath coming in, soft and steady whispers. His eyes scanned her placid face in the darkness, thinking she looked so young again in her sleep. Soon his eyes closed, and he lay there remembering all the days that had ended just like this one and felt himself slowly slipping into a dream.



-T. Patterson

The Lies I loved

How lovely morning light

crept over the trees,

The orchard,

And the wet blades of green,

To find me,

To find you,

To find us together.

It danced across the green-shingled roof,

Slid down the chipped white paint

Of the house's siding

And settled in my eye.

I was dizzy,

Detached.

So sweetly blanketed in autumn's

Veil of blue, blue skies

And the warmth of your hand in mine.

How true I dreamed

the lies I loved.

But when moonlight's pale stain

Hallmarks

Draped itself about my shoulders,
I somehow only craved the dark,
And forgot you;
Let you melt away like sunset.

How quickly innocence can dribble down
to gather in a river of regret.
A river rushing hard and fast
to rid itself of its own blood,
I lost you then,
drop by drop.



- K. Binkley

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The Harpeth Hall School

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